

Endless Numbered Days

Posted originally on the [Archive of Our Own](http://archiveofourown.org/works/1854724) at <http://archiveofourown.org/works/1854724>.

| | |
|-------------------|--|
| Rating: | Mature |
| Archive Warnings: | Creator Chose Not To Use Archive Warnings , Major Character Death |
| Category: | F/F |
| Fandom: | Kill la Kill |
| Relationship: | Kiryuuin Satsuki/Matoi Ryuuko |
| Characters: | Matoi Ryuuko , Kiryuuin Satsuki |
| Additional Tags: | wow i'm so sorry , Self-Indulgent , may be medically inaccurate , difficulty mode: medium , Cancer |
| Language: | English |
| Stats: | Published: 2014-06-27 Words: 6,780 Chapters: 1/1 |

Endless Numbered Days

by [janewithwhy](#)

Summary

Give all that you are able and take only what she gives.

Notes

If you'd like to leave me hate mail please direct yourself to janewithwhy.tumblr.com.

See the end of the work for more [notes](#)

When she gets sick the first time, she doesn't really talk to you about it—she just said she had a lot of appointments she had to go to for half an hour three times a week for five to seven weeks. She asked for your help because you both grew up; the fire of your feuds and petty nuances went out long ago, replaced instead with an ember that burns in a different tint, smoldering like a match lit beneath the feet of you both. You didn't worry because she didn't seem worried; maybe you got too complacent with her always being right—the challenges you used to throw at her seemed to have fallen by the wayside.

Five to seven weeks—you should have been smarter, more diligent, should have been less self involved and then maybe you would have realized the severity of the sickness. But even then, you're not too sure. She played the whole thing off with such grace and dignity; you wouldn't even have known if not for the fact that you waited in the car for her to walk out at slower pace than which she walked in. She scolded you the first time you rushed out to aid her. When you tried to take her gently by the elbow, she twisted and huffed, growled that she could do it herself, and so you learned to stay in the car. During one of the later weeks, you found yourself watching her walk back to your spot, slower than usual. You gripped the handle of your door when she swayed, but you thought about that disgusted look she gave you the last time, and so you sat there with your knuckles turning white, waiting for when she would be sitting beside you. Years ago, you probably would have rushed out without a second thought.

She was winded, as she got into the car, then. Her eyes were closed and you knew that she was trying to still her world, trying to make herself the center of it once more. Focused and determined—that's when she looked most beautiful, when you found yourself running too fast down a steep hill headlong into an oncoming flood of emotions that you have since learned to bury deep inside yourself, another secret you keep tucked away, another part of you that you've learned to stifle over the years. You tried not to brush her hair from her face or smooth out the furrow in her brow; instead, foolishly, you reached to place a hand upon her; it was the wrong thing to do. She shifted away from you then, glaring.

"Don't, Matoi," she hissed before slipping her eyes shut once more. You wanted to wait for her breath to settle, but she would have nothing of it. "What are you waiting for?"

"I—just... I wanted to make sure you're alright."

"I'm fine," she growled, clearly annoyed. As you turned on the car that day, a part of her from a long time ago seemed to come back as she straightened herself in your passenger seat and slowly opened her eyes to stare down the road ahead.

She didn't let you help her out of the car when you dropped her off, either. She shut your door with a little too much force and offered a curt thank you as a simultaneous apology. When she walked up those steps that day, back straight, focused, trying not to sway or topple, you thought you were seeing a memory. A breeze lifted her long hair (not waist length as it had once been) and you caught sight of her clenched fists as she strode up those apartment steps, her heels clack-clack-clacking on the stone beneath her.

If she turned around at the top, you would have sworn you were seventeen again.

--

The second time she gets sick is worse and she has to talk to you about it.

“Ryuko,” she says through the receiver. “I’m having surgery.”

“Oh,” you pause, awkward. “Is it—”

“Yes,” she interrupts. “Yes, it’s the same thing. It’s scheduled for next week I ne—can you stay here? My apartment? Just for a few weeks, afterward.”

“Yea, yea,” you breathe. “Definitely, no problem. I can take you, if you need.”

“Thank you,” she says, and you hear her voice soften. You imagine the faint smile that graces her lips, her phone wedged between her shoulder and her ear—in the background you can hear her preparing dinner. “I’ll need you to come to an appointment with me. There’ll be some after-care procedures the doctors will want to go over with you.”

“Eh, no problem,” you say. You hear a faint puff of air and assume she’s only mildly laughing at you.

“Alright, I’ll forward you the details when I get them,” she says. “But I have to go, okay? See you soon. Love you.”

“Love you, too,” you hear yourself say. Years ago, when you first had to learn how to say that to her, you tried to find the one that wasn’t too overzealous or too nonchalant. You often stumbled over the syllables, clipping the vowels or elongating the consonants before you found a way to say it that just sounded neutral—you committed it to muscle memory, a reaction to quell the one that you wanted to say, the way you wanted to say it.

After that conversation, everything became a blur. One day turned into the next, which bled into another; it was a gradient of meetings and words you had to look up and procedures they needed you to take care of and paper work she made you look over. They all bled together until you became aware of yourself, suddenly, sitting in her bedroom, the both of you reading—with a snap, she’d shut her book, pulling you out of your haze to turn to her.

“This is dull,” she says, a sigh in her throat. It causes you to laugh.

“You wanna watch a movie or something?” you ask her.

“No, I want to get out of bed. I want to go for a run,” she answers, dejectedly. She turns her head to look at you, pausing before speaking. “Can you sit with me?”

You feel the muscles in your face twist into a smile. Quickly, you reign in the corners and tighten the middle of your lip like you always have. It stops the eagerness to fulfill the request from spilling out of you and with much practiced ease you make your way over to her with some amount of hesitation—every time you do this, it feels awkward and clumsy and too deliberate, but you’ve done it for so long with no amount of external protest that it must look natural.

She makes you sit against the headboard so that she can lay her head in the crook of your arm, one hand splayed against your stomach. She sighs contentedly. You want to say something—something biting like, look at the great big softie, Kiryuuin Satsuki now. But you know better. You're just as soft as she is, these days.

"Remember when we used to fight?" she says, idly. You hum and run your fingers absently through her hair, thinking.

"Do you think you can still kick me through a wall?"

She chuckles against you, the song of it resonating through your chest. You think you feel her hand clench against you, but perhaps you're imagining it. "Matoi, I can barely lift my own leg."

You rap her playfully on the skull but don't say anything. She is thin and tired, most of her muscle gone to the radiation, and there's a hollowness in her cheeks that wasn't there before her surgery. You can feel yourself start to worry for her, like something small is pulling, tugging at your heart, nudging you to prepare for the worst. You scoff at the acknowledgement of the notion. Nothing can hold down your sister. Not even you. Not even this.

Before you know it, she is asleep against your chest.

--

Days later, she's not as bed ridden, but walking and maneuvering too much still winds her, so she opts to stand at her bay windows for extended amounts of time. You're doing the dishes in her kitchen, trying to make sure everything is as spotless as she requires (a feat that you've managed to pull off with no small amount of concentration) when she says something to you that you can't hear. You shut the water off and you see her glance at you, the light of the afternoon sun catching the side of her face as she turns, reminding you of some deity you can't remember the name of.

"I said, she used to smoke a lot," Satsuki says before turning her head from you and taking a sip of her tea. You wipe your hands on the back of your pants, before slowly going over to her. "A lot. In the house, when I was younger. Especially after dad left." *With you.*

You can feel the slow clench of your fists, a reaction and a habit you formed whenever you thought of that monster.

"Maybe that's why," she continues. She sits in the armchair you moved to the front of the house so she could sit after standing for so long. She lays a palm against her chest, trying to steady her breath. "They did say that I was too young and too healthy for lung cancer."

"What was it you said? No one on this earth can do something before Kiryuuin Satsuki?" you hear yourself say. It's some remnant of you, prior to this, lost to the passage of time that speaks in your voice. You meant it as a sneer, maybe, but it comes out more like a tired grimace, a confession. This time, when you place your hand on her shoulder, she does not turn away.

“Yea,” she says, tiredly, as she lays her cheek against your forearm. Bitterly, she adds, “Even in death, she refuses to leave me alone.”

You give her shoulder a squeeze, opting for silence instead of something stupid you know you could say. No amount of words would make this better.

Her eyes slip shut again and you don’t want to move, so you stand there until her breathing softens. Slowly, you adjust her head, hoping that she doesn’t wake up with a crick in her neck amongst her other pains. Leaning over, you pluck the teacup from her loose fingers just as she parts her lips and sighs into your ear. It sends a shiver down your spine.

By the time you are done with the dishes, the afternoon sun is hanging low; a beam of light carves through the front of the house, framing her perfectly and lighting up the soft curve of her cheek.

You remember now.

Athena.

--

She went into remission for a while. Nonon was so angry after Satsuki told everybody. Leave it to Satsuki to only offer what she feels is right at the given time. You remember Nonon coming up to you, punching you in the shoulder, and then thanking you for being a good sister. Maybe years ago you would have retaliated, punched her back, called her some name, but you just held onto the spot she hit you, feeling the bruise start to form. The both of you are not so young anymore; you both lack the bite you had so many years ago, but maybe some amount of bark is still there.

During the remission period, it was easy for you to fall back into your old ways of absence. It’s always been better for you when she isn’t right there: palpable, touchable, available. Out of sight and out of mind. She is, after all, the only person who could ever put you on the defensive. Even now, after all this time, you’re not sure who you’re trying to protect: her or yourself.

It doesn’t take much to throw you over the edge; it never has. It takes only the subtle details of her to catch you falling—the delicate curve of her wrist as she tosses her hair over her shoulder, the way she folds her hands in her lap when she sits down, the crinkle in her nose when she is annoyed. When you’re around her, too close, you’re falling down a dark hole and losing yourself completely. You promised yourself you wouldn’t go there, for the both of you. Maybe, mostly, for her. There was a darkness there that you didn’t want to subject her to, a sinister implication of your kinship that you knew you did not want to trigger her with.

You harbored those feelings inside of yourself: a dirty secret, a graveyard for affection. No amount of time has ever been able to destroy what you’ve always felt for her. No amount of time has allowed you to move on. What likes of any one else could ever match you?

Absolutely none.

--

Even if you had a hundred years, would you be able to say to her all of the things that you wanted to say? You'll never know, because they gave her only a few months. Gave—what a joke. What a cruel twist of words, as if time and life was something to be given. There was some old part of you that flared up when they phrased it like that—all of a sudden you found your fingers curling around the fabric of the doctor's coat, your teeth barred, his face inches from yours. She put a calm hand on your shoulder and you flinched, but you let him go.

“Please, forgive my sister,” she'd said. You turned your red face away in embarrassment and shame, then—either from your actions or the title, you're not sure.

You'd forgotten what it was like to feel as if you were going to burst at the seams from this secret you hold—you'd gotten so good at wrestling it down and keeping it hidden when time was not a factor. But now time is a factor and the brevity of life suddenly has you thinking about telling her constantly. You're never sure if it's going to be worth it. If you say it out loud, it becomes real and if it's real then maybe you are as sick as that darkness is inside of you. You picture the way she would recoil from you, the disgust that would carve itself into the hard lines of her face—valleys of putrid distaste for your abominable devotion.

When you're truly self-indulgent, you imagine the gentle caress of her delicate fingers upon your face, the slow frontal lean of her body toward you, the smell of tea leaves and the faintest hint of lavender before she kisses you on the mouth and returns your sinful affections. When you're desperate (when you are truly desperate, like some deprived animal thrashing about in the woods of these dreams), you imagine her sighing against your neck, hands tightening against your scalp, those pretty parted lips gasping your name as you make her unravel from the inside out. When you find yourself biting down on your own knuckle, face down in your own bed, hips bucking against your own hand, crying out her name as some unknown constellation explodes against your eyelids in the middle of some hot summer night, you feel disgusted with yourself and wish that you had her sickness instead.

How long has it been since you indulged in such disturbed fantasies? Since you last found yourself on your knees, mouth open, gasping against your sheets as you pleased yourself to the point of trembling thighs and bent wrist with the image of her angelic face flashing through your mind? Those furrowed brows and pointed chin, the gentle slope of her nose, that slim pale neck—you grimace when you realize that perhaps it was the last time she was sick that you did such a wretched thing. What vile weakness. What horrid genes lie in you, that beg for you to touch her so that she may be the only fulfillment in your life that you could ever hope to receive.

--

“Ryuko.”

“Mmmm?”

Rubbing at your eyes and snapping back up into a sitting position, you look at your sister. She is smiling sadly, but you think that all of her smiles are sad these days. Glancing at one of the many machines beeping, connected to her, you check to make sure that she is fine. The

numbers say she's fine, but you glance back at her slightly sunken cheeks and thin arms and the collarbones that protrude just a little too much. You can't help it when you grab her hand, finding that it had slipped out of your grasp when you fell asleep at her bedside.

She tugs it away from you, a slight panic in your chest starting to form before she lifts her palm to lay atop your head, stroking your hair. You slip your eyes shut and lean against her touch; you've grown so self-indulgent these days.

"Ryuko," she says again. "I need to ask you something."

The hand on your head pauses and falls, causing you to open your eyes once more. She's fixing you with one of her serious stares, the kind that still makes people tremble—even in her state of health. You smirk at her, taking her hand again, relieved when she does not pull it from you.

"You never ask me anything," you say. She lets out this puff of air that resembles a laugh.

"I find it easier to tell you than to ask," she replies as she brushes her thumb against the top of your hand. "But this is... a little more important."

You look at her curiously, feeling your own head tilt to one side. You feel your brows furrow when she lets out a deep, shaky breath.

"What should I do?" she says, barely a whisper. You're vaguely aware of the tempo from the machine next to her start beeping only slightly faster.

"What do you mean, Sats?"

She coughs, and angles her chin up and away from you. That's when you realize that she's crying. She sniffs, still glancing up towards the ceiling, trying to stop the tears from coming, trying to straighten her back, trying to become young again.

"I can't do this anymore," she says, after a few moments. "I can't lie in this bed all the time."

You pull away from her slightly, trying to school your features into something that doesn't look like panic or distress. You already know what's coming.

"People expect me to fight, but I'm tired and exhausted, Matoi," she says, eyes brimming with tears. "We're not going to buy me much more time by keeping me here, and the quality of the time that we borrow will be abysmal."

Your heart drops as you hear the next words tumble out of her mouth.

"I don't want to give up," she sobs. She chokes on her tears and brings her hands to cover her face like an embarrassed child. "But I can't lay like this anymore."

"Hey, hey," you coo, kicking off your shoes and climbing into her hospital bed without a second thought. Half heartedly, she tries to shove you away, but you know it's all for show as you wrap your arms around her thin shoulders. Her whole body shakes with the force of her crying and she leans bodily against you.

“I’m dying, Ryuko,” she chokes out. “What do I do? I can’t become a slave to the medicine in the hopes that maybe it grants me a few decrepit months. I’m dying and there’s no changing that this time—I can’t keep laying in this awful bed.”

You hold her tighter, closer, bury your nose in her hair and smell that faint scent of lavender there even through the sharp scent of hospital antiseptic. You feel her fist tighten against your loose shirt as she cries and you’ll be the first to admit that this would bring you to tears too, if not the fact that you feel some unsettling obligation to her that requires you to stay strong. Is this outburst uncharacteristic of her? Not in the slightest. You were waiting for it, honestly. You would have been more surprised had she opted to just lie there, accepting treatment, stealing something that resembled time.

“This is so like you,” you breath against her once she’s settled down after a few minutes. You rub soothing circles on her back. “Nobody’s going to fucking think you gave up if you ran out of here and tried to do the shit you wanted to do without being hooked up to some fucking box, sis.” She is quiet against you, perhaps contemplative. “I think we’re all waiting for you to do that anyway.”

“I’d have less time,” she whispers. Like a child waking up, she pulls away from you and wipes her face with the back of her thin hands. Her nose is red, splotches of emotion starting to blossom across her cheeks, lending a pink tinge to her porcelain skin. “Less time to boss you around, tell you what you need to do before I’m gone.”

She gives a mirthless laugh while you force a reaction and snort at her.

“I can take care of myself without you,” you say, trying not to think about whether or not that statement is true. It was true for 17 years. It can be true now. Can’t it? You try to deflect. “You wouldn’t be giving up, you know. You’d still be a fighter. In spite of the medicine.”

“To spite the medicine,” she corrects. One corner of her lips curve upward—the first true smirk you’ve seen on her in weeks, maybe months. You’re falling again. You take your palm and put it over her face and laugh as you squish her nose. She reels back, looking shocked.

“Matoi,” she growls. She sounds good. Healthy, even. Her eyes are lit and there’s color in her cheeks. Maybe her lids are a little puffy from crying and perhaps her nose is a bit too red, but she looks a bit more like she used to and you can’t help the grin that feels as if it’s going to split your face in two.

When she does it back to you, you laugh so hard it feels like a dam bursting.

--

“What are you looking at?”

“You,” she says. “You grew up a lot.”

You snort and fling the book you’re reading over your shoulder.

“Maybe not that much,” she says, watching it sail with precision on the tabletop behind you. Her eyes flick back towards yours and suddenly you wish you didn’t throw the book so you could have at least something to hide behind.

“How are you feeling?”

She shrugs and picks at the blanket draped over her lower half. “Like I have cancer.”

“Wanna go for a walk?” you ask. A small smile creeps across her lips before she replies, not looking at you.

“Yea, I’d like that,” she says. “Can you take me to the park? Nonon insists that the park is too dangerous for me.”

“Nonon doesn’t know shit,” you snort. “C’mon, let’s put you in the chair then.”

She didn’t need the wheelchair at first, but it’s the fastest way to get her around these days. There was a large amount of protest from her when you first brought it home (she may or may not have thrown a hair dryer at you and tried to storm off). You’ve taken to staying back at her apartment full time, taking a temporary leave of absence at work and spending most of your time making sure she gets to where she needs or wants to be. You try very hard not to monopolize her time—though there’s no denying that you want to. She’d been able to do a lot of the things she wanted to do before she got sick, so when you asked her how she wanted to spend the next couple of months, she simply stated that she wanted to be with the people she loved most. It was not uncommon to have a regular rotation of friends coming and going every evening.

As selfish as it may be, you enjoy the mornings the most. When she sits across from you at the dining room table and reads the paper while she sips her tea, it’s almost like life comes together in some semblance of normal. You eat your cereal and try not to stare at her as she adjusts her reading glasses. Most mornings she gets annoyed with the news and ends up sharing headlines with you so you might go back and forth trying to make light of the world. She coughs, sometimes, when she laughs too hard, so you try not to push it, but you want to hear her laugh forever.

Committing it to memory will have to do.

“Are you huffing?”

“Oh, shut up, the hill is steep.”

She laughs lightly and you grip the handles of her chair just a little tighter. She shifts in her seat, trying to look back and up at you.

“Maybe on the way down you can sit on my lap and we can go careening down the hill.”

“Jesus, Satsuki, no! Who are you, me?”

You glance down at her as she turns away from you, and you think you catch her frowning.

“Somebody has to be you,” you hear her say, almost sadly. You roll your eyes so hard you think she can hear it. “All you do is coddle me.”

You snort. You hate it when she gets like this, but you paid enough attention to the doctors to know that this was part of it. She wants people to treat her like she was, not how she is. It’s hard for her, but it’s hard for everyone else, too. You know how selfish that sounds, though, in this situation. Putting yourself into check, you think of an adequate response.

“Maybe only halfway down the hill,” you say. She breathes a puff of air, like a chuckle, in response.

At the top of the hill is a park bench she likes to sit at. You used to live in the neighborhood before you moved an hour out of the city because you were selfish. You said you liked it better on the outskirts, but it was hard to be close to her all the time when your emotions just couldn’t keep themselves in check. Remembering the runs you used to go on with her, you wheel her right over to the bench. She reaches out and touches it.

“Beat you,” she says. You laugh as you lock the wheels of her chair into place, allowing her to transfer to the bench. She pats the seat next to her expectantly and you comply. She lays her head upon your shoulder almost immediately, and you rest your ear against her head.

It’s been hard. It’s been so hard. People come by and they try to hold themselves together, but you’ve seen Nonon sobbing in her car more times than you’ve ever wanted and every time Mako leaves, it’s almost like you have to have a mop ready. You’ve had practice, but you’re not as strong-willed as you let on. That was her thing. Resolve, or whatever. Pretending to be an emotionless eye-of-the-storm was never your forte, but you try. Last week though, you were crying in the bathroom after breakfast, clutching the sink while snot and tears dropped onto your arm as you tried to hold yourself up on weak knees. If she noticed your red eyes and scratchy voice, she made no mention of it.

“Thank you for being here,” she says, watching the sun hang low in the sky, shades of orange and purple painting the horizon. There’s a slight breeze in the air and shouting kids can be heard in the distance but it’s just quiet enough that you can distinguish between her inhales and exhales.

“Where else would I be, doofus?”

She sighs and settles closer against you. To your surprise she takes your hand in both of hers, turning it over and bringing it closer to her face, examining your fingers and comparing the size of your palms. You breathe through your nose as she traces your fingers with the tips of each of her own until your hands are flat against one another.

“Anywhere,” she says. “You could be anywhere else, but you’re here.”

“Why would I be anywhere else?” you scoff. She lowers your hand and you think she’s going to drop it, but she intertwines your fingers and places them in her lap, using her other hand to play with your knuckles.

“You know why,” she whispers, like you’re not meant to hear it, but it flits to your ears as if on the breeze. And maybe you start to panic but she pushes off of you and smiles, still holding your hand, holding onto you. “I’m just glad you’re here.” She pauses, and her face falters for a second, but she continues. “Ever since we met, I’ve been glad to have you here. Even in spite of the fighting.”

She leans towards you as your breath catches in your throat. You turn your head as you've always done, offering your cheek because you would never expect anything else, but you feel her move forward and her lips brush right against the corner of your mouth. She lingers for the briefest of moments but to you, it feels like everything’s suddenly stopped and become so much more significant. The sky is a spectrum of tangerine and maroon and plum; her palm is flush against yours while the middle and ring finger of her other hand press lightly against the taut skin over your metacarpals; a bird chirps, just once, and a child laughs; when you exhale, she pulls away. You can feel the shorter hairs on the back of your neck raised in the breeze.

“It’s getting dark, can you take me back now?” she asks, squeezing your hand. You gulp down whatever lump is in your throat. You’ve done this a hundred times. More than that. You can pretend to have resolve for once.

“Wanna go careening down the hill?” you ask, standing without letting go of her.

“Of course, but I should sit in your lap, your muscles probably haven’t atrophied,” she says. You roll your eyes and welcome the playfulness of the moment despite it’s dark-laced humor.

“Yea whatever, don’t get mad at me when I hit a kid.”

She punches you lightly in the arm and waits for you to set up. When she sits against you, you wrap one arm against her and press your nose against her back.

“Sats?”

“What? Come on, before it gets too dark and you really do hit a child,” she says, a genuine eagerness in her voice that surprises you. She mirrors your hand’s placement and presses her forearm and palm against you. Again, she laces her fingers with yours.

“I just—,” you hesitate. What did you want to say? The truth? Some version of it? You’re not sure, but you feel stupid for your indecision, so you squeeze her tighter against you and she grips your hand in return.

The both of you gain so much momentum down the hill that it becomes a little more than dangerous, in retrospect. But you couldn’t bring yourself to stop or slow—not when she was laughing against you like she had all the time in the world.

--

*whisper your goodbye
so that she can take it there
where you cannot go*

--

*everything you need—
put into a box today
—lowered in the ground*

--

*oh petulant child—
your tantrum won't bring her back
go, confront her ghost*

--

You walk up to the steps of the apartment she left you, the one you lived in when she was still here. It's been months since you slid the key into the lock and twisted it to let yourself in. It's like stabbing yourself with a knife as your fingers fumble to fit the pieces together, and it's like twisting the wound yourself when you try to unlock it fully. Taking a few breaths to steady yourself, you clench and unclench your fingers before swinging the door open and taking quick steps to enter and lock yourself inside before you can change your mind.

It all hits you so much, so fast. Everything smells as if cups of tea were lingering about the space or blossoms of lavender were set up in every corner. It floors you, quite literally, to be back there. You find yourself sitting with your back against the front door, panting, panicking. You grip your chest trying to still your heart and lift your head toward the ceiling, trying not to let tears fall. It's no use—after a while you let them fall. Gathering your breath and wits about you, you move to stand. One step at a time. One step at a time.

It's bizarre, how the apartment doesn't smell of dust. It's eerie that it just feels like she's stepped out for the night, but you know better. You learned better. She's everywhere, but more so here. You glance at the pictures that laden the walls, ones you'd forgotten to look at while you lived here. Everyone looks so happy. You close your eyes and inhale.

You can hear the sound of her laughing.

Setting your keys upon the kitchen counter, you shrug off your jacket and shoes before taking a glass out of the cabinet and filling it with water to calm yourself down. You're taking a sip and looking around and that's when you notice it—something that's there that shouldn't be. On the dining table, an envelope is propped up against an empty vase. It has your name on it. It's written in her handwriting. Foolishly, you stand there, cup in hand, staring at it.

You fingers shake as you reach for it, when you finally do reach for it. When you unfold the pages within, her handwriting glares back at you—full pages worth of such elegant and purposeful scrawl. You take a seat and begin to read.

--

Dear Ryuko,

By the time you read this, I will no longer be by your side, and for that I am truly sorry. I must admit that this letter is entirely selfish and unfair, but I could not go without confessing to you certain things. And besides, I remember that conversation we had—about how only people who did not complete certain personal tasks became ghosts.

You and I both know that I would make a horrible specter.

In all seriousness, however, I apologize for the pain that I am about to inflict upon you. I know dead men tell no tales and can offer no sympathy, but perhaps you could find it in your heart to forgive me, your dead sister.

I'm sorry that I was never able to reciprocate your feelings, but it wasn't for lack of my own. I need to make very clear to you that I have always loved you in a way that is far more complex than just sisterly. Was it because we lived ruinous childhoods that brought us together in unfathomably bizarre circumstances that drew me to you? Perhaps. But it was more personal and less starcrossed than that. How is it that you always managed to see through me? I was 18 years old and at a loss as to how a 17 year old girl could possibly challenge me the way you did. You've continued to do that, right up until the day that I write this letter.

I know that you love me in this same, twisted way that I love you. I'm sorry I could never act upon it. I was selfish. I was selfish then and I am selfish now. It wasn't for the displeasure of our kinship that repulsed me from you—nothing about us ever made me feel sick or disgusting. It was only that I could not bear the thought that, if something were to happen, I would lose the most important person in my life.

Do you see this selfish pattern in my life? I take on this burden without weighing the options with you and I insist that I know what will be for the best. I didn't learn much from back then, did I? Do I regret never pushing the envelope with you? Yes. But I would also never trade the time we spent together for anything else. I'm sorry that we never had this conversation. I just always had this thought that if anything were to go wrong, it would go disastrously wrong. By the time I wanted to fix it, admit that I could find no equal in anybody but you, I was already dying. How could I do that to you?

And yet, I am doing it to you now. I hope that you can forgive me for the distress that I have caused your heart all these years. I suffered the same torment, and I know—it is no consolation prize, but I regret that I did not push us to fall off of that edge with one another. In the end, I guess, it was you who had so much more resolve.

I'm sorry, Ryuko. You gave me some of the best years of my life and I leave you with nothing but material possessions and a handful of memories. After years of growing up with a family that only abused, you gave me what I had only dreamt of having. And yet I could not take it further with you.

I am selfish. But I love you. From then, now, and if we ever meet again, I will love you.

Yours,

--

You're sobbing by the time you get to her signature. Fat, loaded tears are falling onto the dining table and you don't care because there is no ghost to hear you, so you let out a wail, one that you wish could reach her. Cursing, you slam the papers against the tabletop uselessly, the sound of it making a weak flutter that is drowned in your sobbing. Your eyes sting and everything in you suddenly aches, so you dig the heels of your palms into your eyes, trying to stifle at least one sense.

It doesn't work. Everything is so painful when you know that it shouldn't be. You feel like you're on fire but you know it's a figment of your distress. You try to stand but your legs are weak and you fall to your knees. You feel stupid, sobbing like this. You take one of your fists and slam it against the floor, creating a crater of impact there, causing you to stop. Looking at the damage you've caused, you realize how foolish you're being.

Breathing heavily, you wipe your tears against the back of your sleeve.

"Fuck," you hear yourself say, looking at the indentation you've made in your sister's (your) immaculate apartment. Straightening up and kneeling, you sniff. "Guess I gotta wipe away my own tears, huh sis?"

Silence, save for the ticking of a clock.

You listen to it tick-tock until your breathing returns to normal. You reach on top of the table, grabbing her letter, mindful of your inhales and extra long exhales. You read it a second time. After that, you stand and read it a third time. She loved you—that's all you've ever wanted in these years, when it comes down to it. It wasn't enough. Nobody ever will be. But she gave you what she could in this letter.

The sun has lowered; the clock keeps ticking.

You glance towards the front of the apartment—the low hanging sun is carving its beam of light through the front of the house. That chair that you moved to the bay windows stayed there, and the light falls perfectly on it now. Time is still moving.

Closing your eyes, you inhale the scent of tea and lavender all around you. As you exhale, you think about her standing next to you, her hand upon your shoulder, a soft look upon her face.

You don't have to try hard to still hear the sound of her laughter in your ear.

End Notes

I'm sorry if this seems full of too many sad tropes. It wasn't mean to break your heart, it was meant break mine. Self-indulgent angst is what I crave for these two.

Please [drop by the Archive and comment](#) to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!